

Union County Standard Operating Guidelines
Incident Command System

Incident Command System, SOG 2.04

Expanding the Command Structure

The command structure at any incident must correspond to the complexity of the situation. To effectively control an emergency, the incident should be divided into manageable units. In this section, we will examine some of the options the Incident Commander can use to manage an incident

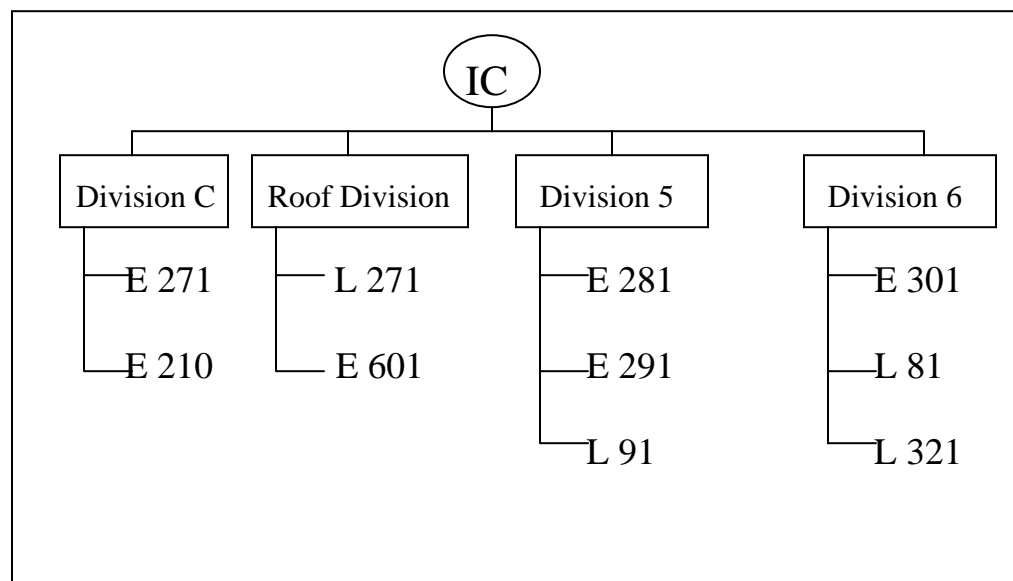
While it is important to have a sufficiently large command structure at an incident, don't use more than the situation requires. The command structure should not contribute to the complexity of the incident. Consider the command options available as a toolbox full of tools. Use only the ones you need to fix the problem.

Remember that any command position can be held by any member. It is the Incident Commander's responsibility to assign the appropriate person to command functions.

NOTE: Terminology to describe the work units may vary between different organizations. Common terms that are acceptable include branches, divisions, groups, and sectors. The recommendations of the National Fire Academy will be utilized for the purposes of this guideline.

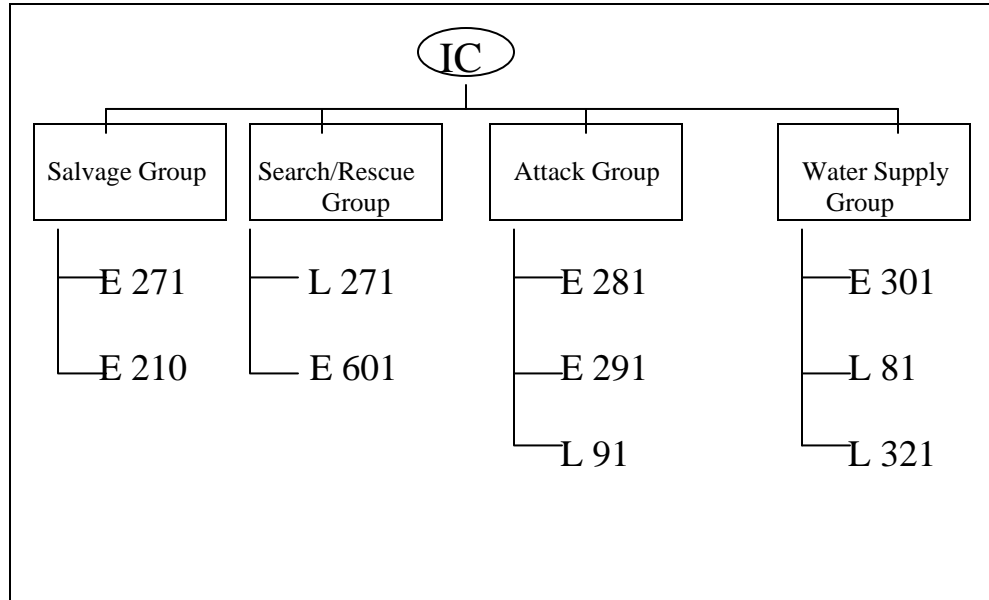
1. Divisions and Groups

A. Divisions: Divisions are an organizational level responsible for operations in a specified geographical area at an incident. You could have an interior division (within a building) or a division outside a building. Some examples are: Division C, Division 5, Roof Division, etc.



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- B. Groups: Groups are an organizational level responsible for a specified functional assignment at an incident. Examples are salvage group, search and rescue group, fire attack group, water supply group, etc.



Divisions and Groups are both commanded by supervisors. Divisions and Groups operate at the same command level. Divisions do not work for Groups and Groups do not work for Divisions. However, a Group's functional responsibility may cross established Division boundaries. For example, a Ventilation Group may be working in the same area as the Interior Division. Once a specific assignment is given to a Group, the division is no longer responsible for that task, concentrating instead on all other tactical activity in that geographic area.

Divisions and Groups address the following three significant management principles:

1. They reduce/solve span-of-control problems at an incident.
2. They provide essential coordination at a designated area or for a specific function.
3. They fix personnel accountability.

Division and Group Supervisors provide accountability and coordination of companies, ensuring maximum safety and survival of response personnel. They are also responsible for the implementation of their assigned portion of the overall incident action plan and they coordinate activities within their assignment. Division and Group Supervisors keep the next higher level of command informed of the status of resources within their area of responsibility and evaluate the resource needs, making adjustments as needed. It is essential that the next higher level of command be made aware of any needs for resource

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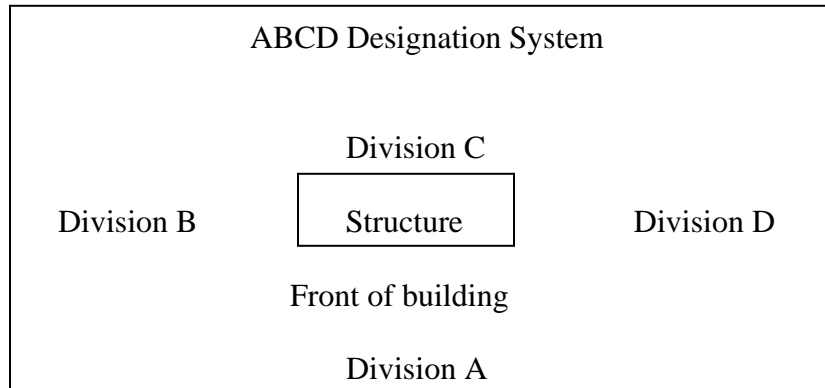
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adjustment. Each Division or Group Supervisor requires certain information from the Incident Commander. They must know their radio designation (Division A or Ventilation Group), their assigned objectives, and the resources under their command.

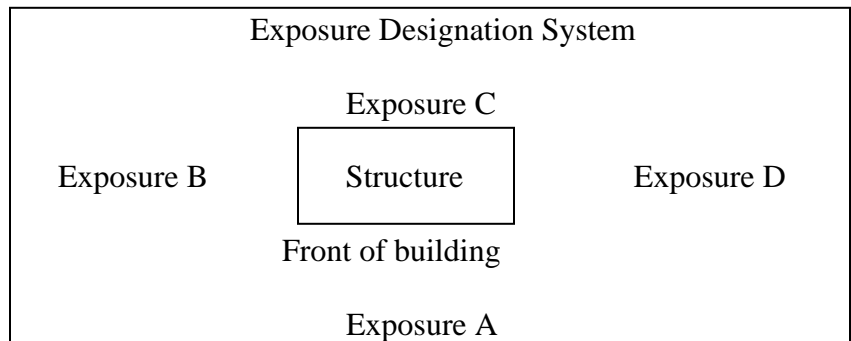
Each functional or geographical assignment does not need to be commanded by a Division or Group supervisor. An activity that only requires one unit to effectively handle the situation would not necessitate the implementation of a Division or Group; there is not a coordination problem and obviously the assignment does not cover a large area or require the deployment of several single resources.

2. Dividing the Incident

To insure uniformity, there needs to be a standard means of dividing an incident. The following designation system will be used whenever it is necessary to divide an incident:

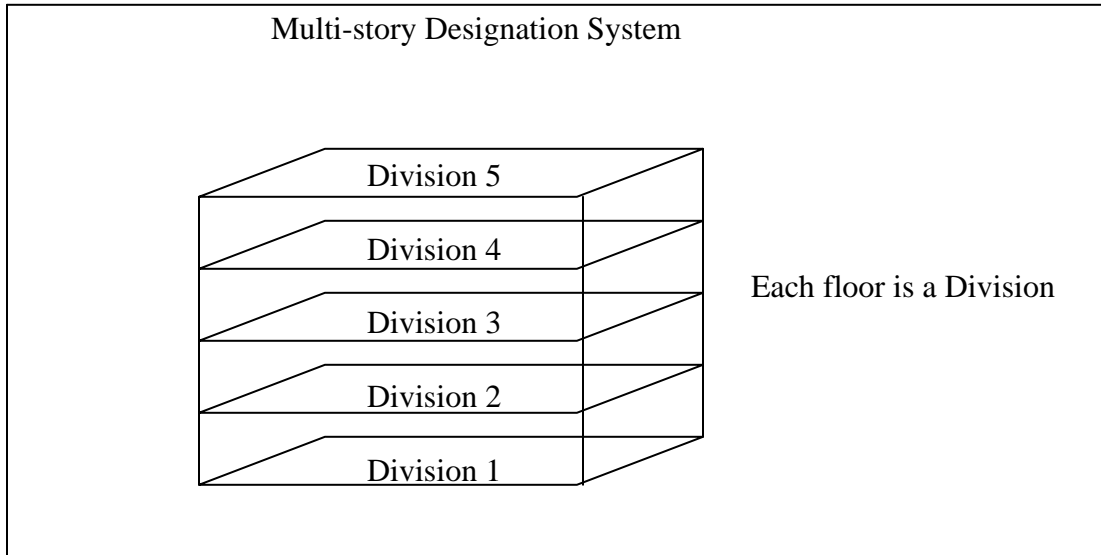


There will be a letter designation for each exterior side of the incident area. Normally, the addressed or street side of the incident will be designated at Division "A" and the letter designations move clockwise around the incident. Exposures may also be identified with a similar system.



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When operating in a multistory structure, it may be necessary to designate geographic locations by floor. This system of geographic designation uses the floor number to identify a Division. For example, the first floor would be designated as Division #1, the second floor Division #2, etc.



3. Branches

At large-scale or complex incidents, the number of Divisions and/or Groups may create a significant span-of-control problem. When this occurs consideration should be given to the implementation of Branches. Branches are also of great value when large numbers of resources are committed to a specific functional activity. A good example would be a fire incident with a major EMS problem. An EMS Branch could be implemented to alleviate these problems.

A Branch is an organizational level between Divisions or Groups and the Incident Commander. A Branch Director is responsible for implementing the portion of the incident action plan appropriate for that particular Branch. Branches are commonly used within the Operations and Logistic sections.

The specific responsibilities of a Branch Director are:

- A. Implements the portion of the incident action plan appropriate to the Branch function.
- B. Coordinates the activities of the units within the Branch.
- C. Evaluates goals and objectives and requests additional resources, if needed.

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- D. Keeps his/her supervisor, whether the IC or the Operations or Logistics Section Chief informed of the status in the Branch's area of responsibility.
- E. Assigns specific tasks to Divisions or Groups within the Branch.
- F. Resolves logistical problems associated with the units deployed in the Branch.

4. Command Staff Positions

At large-scale or complex incidents, consideration may have to be given to the functions of safety, liaison and information. If the Incident Commander cannot effectively handle any of these functions, they must be delegated.

These functions should be staffed when their demands begin to affect the IC's ability to perform his/her command functions.

A. Safety Officer

The individual given the Safety Officer's assignment must monitor and assess the safety hazards and unsafe situations and develop measures for ensuring personnel safety. The Safety Officer may be required to operate in an area(s) other than the Command Post.

The Safety Officer position is implemented to manage the safety of all personnel and to relieve the Incident Commander of direct involvement in this responsibility. The Safety Officer also keeps the IC informed of present problems and potential hazards. He/she should not only identify problems, but should also suggest solutions to minimize the risks. The Incident Commander will use the information provided by the safety Officer during development of the incident action plan.

The Safety Officer has the authority to bypass the chain of command when it is necessary to correct unsafe acts immediately, such as removing all personnel from areas of imminent danger. The IC must ALWAYS be informed of these corrective actions.

For the Safety Officer to be truly effective, he/she must have a broad knowledge of the risks associated with the incident.

B. Liaison Officer

A Liaison Officer is the point of contact for assisting or coordinating agencies. This function is assigned since the Incident Commander may become overloaded by questions from the number of assisting agencies that some incidents attract.

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One of the most important responsibilities of the Liaison Officer is to coordinate the management of assisting or coordinating agencies. This is essential to avoid the duplication of efforts. It allows each agency to perform what it does best. Liaison management provides lines of authority, responsibility, and communication, and increases the control necessary to provide for the safety of personnel from all involved agencies.

C. Information Officer

The information Officer is responsible for interface with the media and other appropriate agencies. This function is implemented to relieve the Incident Commander of needing to work with the media, taking him/her away from command responsibilities. The media needs are real and must be met. They need accurate and consistent information. When the IC is not able to handle both the incident and the media, the Information Officer's position should be implemented.

The Information Officer acts as a central clearing point for the dissemination of information, reducing the risk of generating conflicting information from multiple sources.

The Information Officer must coordinate all releases of significant information with the Incident Commander. The IC will decide on sensitive topics, such as the cause of the incident, victims' name, and any other information that should not be (and does not have to be) released immediately to the press.

5. General Staff Functions

As incidents increase in complexity or size, it often becomes necessary for the Incident Commander to delegate major functional responsibilities to maintain an effective workload and span of control.

Effective incident management involves more than just putting water on a fire or merely stabilizing the incident. The IC needs to be aware of the full range of management tools that are available to handle the entire incident. If major functional authority for Operations, Planning, Logistics, and/or Finance is not delegated, the IC must perform those functions. (Use only the tools necessary to safely and effectively manage the incident.)

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A. Operations

Operations is responsible for management of all tactical operations at the incident. The person in charge of Operations is called the Operations Section chief.

Operations is implemented when the Incident Commander is faced with a complex incident having major demands in one or more of the remaining major functional areas. For example, the IC may be faced with a rapidly escalating incident with a significant need to evaluate strategy and to develop alternative tactical options. Faced with a major functional responsibility in addition to management of tactical Operations, the IC may choose to staff Operations.

Another reason to staff Operations would be multiple functional demands placed on the Incident Commander, such as the Planning, Logistics and Finance workload generated by a hazardous materials incident. When several major functions have been delegated, the IC may need to staff Operations to maintain an effective span of control.

The Operations Section Chief is responsible for the direction and coordination of all tactical Operations. As a part of this overall responsibility, Operations also:

- i. Assists the IC in developing strategic goals and tactical objectives for the incident.
- ii. Develops operational plans
- iii. Requests or releases resources through the IC.
- iv. Consults with the IC about the overall incident action plan.
- v. Keeps the IC informed of situation and resource status within Operations.
- vi. Supervises the staging area manager.

The most common reason for staffing Operations is to relieve span-of-control problems for the Incident Commander. A complex incident, in which the IC needs assistance determining strategic goals and tactical objectives, may also require implementing Operations.

B. Planning

Planning is responsible for the collection, evaluation, dissemination, and use of information about the development of the incident and the status of resources. The person in charge of Planning is called the Planning Section Chief.

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When faced with a complex or rapidly escalating incident, the Incident Commander may require assistance with the Planning function. Planning must include an assessment of the present and projected situation. In addition to assessment of the situation status, there is a critical need to maintain information about resources committed to the incident and projected resource requirements.

The Planning Section Chief is responsible for managing information about incident status and resources. As a part of this major responsibility, Planning also performs the following functions:

- i. Collection of information regarding the incident and resources.
- ii. Evaluation of information received from a variety of sources.
- iii. Dissemination of information to the IC, Operations, and incident personnel, as necessary.
- iv. Use of information in preparation of the incident action plan.

Planning assists the Incident Commander in:

- i. Developing an effective incident action plan based on projected needs.
- ii. Modifying the incident action plan to meet changing needs.
- iii. Anticipating changing resource needs.
- iv. Preparing alternate strategies and tactical options based on incident potential.

The Planning Section Chief may need to establish functional units to maintain an acceptable span of control. These units may include, but are not limited to, the following:

SITUATION STATUS UNIT (SITSTAT)
RESOURCE STATUS UNIT (RESTAT)
DOCUMENTATION UNIT
DEMOBILIZATION UNIT
TECHNICAL SPECIALISTS

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C. Logistics

Logistics is responsible for providing facilities, services, and materials for the incident. The person in charge of Logistics is called the Logistics Section Chief.

As incidents grow in size, complexity, and duration, the logistical needs of the operating forces also increase. Even in a relatively simple structure fire, there are requirements for breathing air supply, drinking water, and emergency medical care. Long duration incidents of any type require provisions for feeding personnel, toilet facilities, refueling of apparatus, and a myriad of other service and support resources.

The Logistics Section Chief manages service and support resources required for the incident. The Logistics Section Chief is responsible for all logistics functions needed for an incident. This individual should establish functional units when needed to maintain an acceptable workload and span of control. Branches may be required within Logistics to maintain span of control when several functional units are established.

SERVICE BRANCH
COMMUNICATIONS UNIT
MEDICAL UNIT (for emergency personnel, not civilians)
FOOD UNIT

SUPPORT BRANCH
SUPPLY UNIT
FACILITIES UNIT
GROUND SUPPORT UNIT

D. Finance

Finance is responsible for tracking all incident costs and evaluating the financial considerations of the incident. The person in charge of Finance is called the Finance Section Chief.

Financial considerations are not a major factor during most incident operations. However, when a department is involved in any incident that requires the use of private-sector resources, the financial considerations can be extensive.

The Finance Section Chief must provide for the documentation of all incident costs, and provide guidance to the Incident Commander on

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financial issues that may have an impact on incident operations. These responsibilities include:

- i. Future payments
- ii. Future budgeting
- iii. Payment of personnel costs
- iv. Cost recovery

The Finance section is usually staffed in large-scale or complex incidents. A likely candidate for Finance Section Chief might be the chief financial officer of the jurisdiction in which the incident occurs.

The Finance Section Chief is responsible for all Finance functions needed for an incident. This individual should establish functional units when needed to maintain an acceptable workload and span of control. These units could include:

TIME UNIT
PROCUREMENT UNIT
COMPENSATION/CLAIMS UNIT
COST UNIT

6. Command Staff Incident Advisory Teams

The incident scene is often a dynamic, intense and exciting place. As the incident grows into and past the requirements of a single alarm assignment, the incident commander can become overloaded and overwhelmed with information management, assigning companies, filling out and updating the tactical worksheet, planning forecasting, calling for additional resources, talking on the radio, and fulfilling all other functions of Command. The immediate need of Command at this point in the incident, is support. The Incident Commander should utilize the next arriving Command Officer as a Support Officer. If the Incident Commander is still playing catch up with the functions of Command, the only reason to assign the second Command Officer to a sector is if safety is an extreme in that sector.

Roles and Responsibilities of the Support Officer:

- Define, evaluate, and recommend changes to the plan
- Provide direction relating to tactical priorities, specific critical fireground factors, and safety
- Evaluate the need for additional resources
- Assign logistics responsibilities
- Assist with the tactical worksheet for control and accountability
- Evaluate the fireground organization and span of control
- Other duties as necessary

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Senior Advisor

The Senior Advisor will normally be the district commander, the duty deputy, the Operations Division Assistant Chief, or the highest ranking officer in the Command Post. The officer serving as “Command” and the Support Officer would focus on the completion of the tactical priorities, the strategic and tactical plan and the other components of the incident. The Senior Advisor’s focus is looking at the entire incident and its impact from a broader perspective and providing direction, guidance and advice to the “Command” and/or Support Officer. In this role the Senior Advisor is essentially acting as the overall Incident Advisor.

Role and Responsibilities of the Senior Advisor

- Review and evaluate the plan, and initiate any needed changes
- Provide on-going review of the overall incident (THE BIG PICTURE)
- Review the organizational structure, initiate change or expansion to meet incident needs
- Initiate Section and Branch functions as required
- Provide a liaison with other city agencies and officials, outside agencies, property owners and/or tenants
- Other duties as necessary

In order to maintain continuity and overall effectiveness, the Senior Advisor and Support Officer must be in the Command Post with the Incident Commander

When a Support Officer and Senior Advisor are supporting the “Command” in the Command Post there are three people performing the functions of Command. They are working as a team to enhance the command process and make the functions of command more effective. The officer assigned to communicate directly to Companies, Divisions, or Branches will use the radio designation “Command”, and should be the only member of the command team talking on the tactical radio talk group.

Command Structure

It is the responsibility of Command to develop an organizational structure, using standard operating procedures, to effectively manage the incident scene. The development of the organizational structure should begin with deployment of the first arriving fire department unit and continue through a number of phases, depending on the size and complexity of the incident. The Command organization must develop at a pace which stays ahead of the tactical deployment of personnel and resources. In order for the Incident Commander to manage the incident, he/she must first be able to direct, control, and track the position and function of all operating Companies. Building a command organization is the best support mechanism the incident commander can utilize to achieve the harmonious balance between managing personnel and incident needs. Simply put, this means:

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Large scale and complex incidents = Big Command Organization

Small scale and “simple” incidents = Small Command Organization

The Incident Commander should have more people working than commanding

The basic configuration of command includes three levels:

Strategic Level – Overall direction of the incident

Tactical Level – Objectives assigned to Divisions

Task Level – Task objectives assigned to Companies

Summary:

The functional positions that are staffed depend on the needs of the incident. As a general rule, the larger or more complex the incident, the more need there is to delegate functional responsibilities. Functional responsibilities for any positions that are not staffed remain with the Incident Commander.

In situations where the IC needs to delegate functional authority and the functional considerations are not extensive, some functions may be combined. For example: Planning and Logistics or Information Officer and Liaison Officer. However, some functional assignments should not be combined in a complex incident due to their critical impact on safety or incident control.

The Incident Command system is a resource that can be applied on an as-needed basis. It is a practical, realistic approach to incident management.

If fully understood, it will not only make your job easier, but it will also make it possible for all of us to become truly professional emergency incident managers.

Understand the entire system, but apply only what is necessary in your day-to-day incidents. Regular use of the ICS provides the training for future expansion. When the correct terms are used, relationships are established and guidelines are practiced so that the management of larger incidents will be built on a strong foundation.

Except for the simplest incident, there is always more than one way to organize an incident. Be flexible and use your imagination.

Whether the incident is a small grass fire or the unique, one-in-a-career incident, your thorough knowledge of the Incident Command System will ensure a safer, more effective approach to emergency incident management.